

**Unconfirmed**



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held as a Remote Meeting via Zoom on **Thursday 23 July 2020 at 6:30pm**

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

**Other Members present:**

Councillor Norman Brooks, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Steve Wiles

**Officers present:** Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer), Kerry Blair (Head of Operations), Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Kathryn Hurlock (Asset and Investment Manager), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer)

**Others present:** Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs (SCC), John Clements, Head of Infrastructure and Asset Management, Suffolk Highways, Ben Cook, Asset and Policy Commissioning Manager, Suffolk Highways, Chris Graves, Service Manager for Highways Services Contract, Network Assurance and Highway Licensing and Enforcement (SCC), Sam Guiver, Network Assurance Manager (SCC)

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**1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

There no apologies for absence were received.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**3a Minutes - 28 May 2020**

It was proposed by Councillor Deacon, seconded by Councillor Green and by unanimous vote

**RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 May 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **3b Minutes - 18 June 2020**

It was proposed by Councillor Robinson, seconded by Councillor Coulam, and by unanimous vote

#### **RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 June 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **4 Presentation on the processes and management associated with road closures**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, Suffolk County Council (SCC); John Clements, Head of Infrastructure and Asset Management, Suffolk Highways; Ben Cook, Asset and Policy Commissioning Manager, Suffolk Highways; Chris Graves, Service Manager for Highways Services Contract, Network Assurance and Highway Licensing and Enforcement (SCC); and, Sam Guiver, Network Assurance Manager (SCC).

The Committee received a comprehensive presentation on the processes and management associated with road closures.

The Chairman invited questions for Councillor Reid and the accompanying Officers.

A member of the Committee referred to previous long-term road closures, at the same time but in two locations within her ward which had, she said, been the result of works by two utility companies being granted at the same time and had caused serious disruption to a market town. Councillor Reid referred to the change of processes which, he suggested, would result in a different and improved experience for road users now. He added that emergency works must be done immediately and so the potential for the road network to be compromised was always a possibility but, if time allowed, this would be mitigated by revoking other works.

Another member of the Committee asked about the lengthening of yellow lines around corners and said this was often a matter raised by her constituents. Mr Clements replied that this was a Traffic Regulation process and subject to a number of factors including Traffic Regulation processes subject to consultation and the risks and nuances of certain locations.

A further member of the Committee asked if the County Council and Highways operatives were asked to report dirty or damaged road signs for repair or removal. Councillor Reid said road signs were the responsibility of Highways and their repair or replacement was prioritised by safety issues, but sometimes constrained by budgetary issues. Mr Clements added that differing types of defect were identified as part of routine safety inspections.

The Chairman asked about the cleaning of road signs. Mr Clements replied that this was prioritised and carried out according to available budget. Councillor Reid said that a current project was the renewal of all signs and road markings outside schools and this would be completed in the next few months.

Another member of the Committee asked about the responsibility for clearing drainage gullies and removal of silt etc. Mr Clements outlined how data was used to ensure a more effective cyclical programme of works. The member then referred to complaints he had received of road closures being established but no work having been carried out. Mr Guiver said this was possibly a failing by a utility company and added that, if so, Highways/SCC had powers to remove such works if it was evident no work was being undertaken. A further member referred to badly restored road surfaces following work by some utility companies and asked what was possible to reinstate these. Councillor Reid stated that the quality of restoration and making-good works was sampled to ensure the required standard was met. He referred the Committee to the Department of Transport's (DoT) statutory Code of Practice against which, he said, restoration works were policed; he referred to charges which could be incurred by utilities if defects were identified. Mr Guiver said it was important to realise that some restoration work was temporary and the final repairs would be of a higher quality.

In response to a question from the Vice Chairman related to budgets, Councillor Reid referred to the budget received from the DoT, Councillor Reid referred to the last slide in the presentation. He added that reactive repairs had increased some 30% during the lock-down period.

Another member of the asked what local knowledge was applied when considering a request for a permit to undertake road works in order to minimise disruption. Mr Guiver said that as well as datasets and digital perspectives, local inspectors who lived and/or worked in the area of the proposed roadworks would be consulted.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Councillor Reid and his Officers for an extensive presentation.

## **5 Review of the Asset Management Strategy 2019/23**

Councillor Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development, introduced the item.

The Asset and Investment Manager summarised the published report **ES/0443** which set out the work undertaken by Asset Management in line with the Asset Management Strategy and, specifically, addressed the policies for the purchase and construction of new assets; investment in existing assets; the transfer of assets to other organisations; and, the disposal of surplus assets. The Asset and Investment Manager added that the purpose of the Asset Management Strategy was to guide both Officer and Councillor decision-making over the next three years, in line with the East Suffolk Business Plan, and related to the day to day management, specifically the administration, compliance, acquisition and disposal, of property. The report outlined the progress made, to date, using the Strategy as a basis for the structure of information provided. The Asset and Investment Manager emphasised the important of the implementation of the Strategy and said that, as a team, a project delivery plan had been prepared to map how it was intended to deliver the Strategy, in practice; whilst there was a significant amount of work to be completed, this was reviewed every eight weeks formally and on a weekly basis informally.

The Asset and Investment Manager said an additional qualified chartered surveyor had been recruited to help manage the day to day work and additional training had also

been undertaken to ensure Officers provided the most up to date professional advice to both Members and the Council's Senior Management Team. The Team had cross-referenced all newly uploaded asset data to ensure the Register remained current and a rigorous process of risk assessing every asset to determine its inspection cycle and to help improve Health & Safety information relating to the portfolio.

The Asset and Investment Manager, with reference to the Committee's remit for the item, advised that the Strategy set out a comprehensive process which included detailed due diligence, formal RICS Red Book (*contains mandatory rules, best practice guidance and related commentary for all RICS members undertaking asset valuations*) appraisals and additional considerations relating to funding etc. A checklist was included within the Strategy document to ensure all details were obtained and process was followed and recorded correctly. The Committee was informed that existing assets were continually invested in through the planned maintenance programme; this was a cyclical process which ensured all assets had an up to date condition survey and maintenance was budgeted in advance for scheduled repairs. There was also a comprehensive capital works programme which sought to revitalise assets or in some cases redevelop these for alternative uses. The Asset and Investment Manager said it was important that investment was not just the purchase of new assets but also included the up-keep of the existing portfolio.

With regard to the transfer of assets to other organisations, the Asset and Investment Manager advised that the Strategy outlined the potential for divestment to community groups and there was a specific process for Community Asset Transfers within the Strategy document. The Council had entered into discussions with various town councils and transfers of play equipment, open spaces and public conveniences to town councils that had expressed interest in owning and managing these themselves, had taken place.

The Committee noted that the Council's portfolio comprised a number of different assets and a significant proportion might be deemed as surplus. The Strategy set out a comprehensive process for the disposal of assets; the process outlined the general principles for disposal including site identification, discussion at the Asset Management Group, internal notifications, due diligence, valuation, building surveys and the formation of a business case for consideration by Cabinet. The Asset and Investment Manager said work was on-going to determine - on an asset by asset basis - whether these should be let, sold, re-developed or divested. Currently, twelve assets had been identified for potential sale and proposals to dispose of these assets would be prepared for consideration. In conclusion, the Asset and Investment Manager said the KPIs at the rear of the Strategy were reviewed on a quarterly basis with the responsible Cabinet Member to ensure continued progress with the implementation of the Strategy.

The Chairman invited questions.

A member of the Committee asked if there was confidence that all the assets were logged on the register and also asked how many assets were currently vacant and if Ward Members could be informed of these so that any innovative suggestions for their use might be sought. The Asset and Investment Manager said there was a comprehensive consolidation process to cross-check every asset and that she was

confident all assets were registered. She added that vacant assets needed to be inspected and this included an assessment of possible reuse; a status report was then provided to the responsible Cabinet Member. It was confirmed that if Ward Members wished to engage in this process and had ideas to revitalise a vacant asset this would be welcomed.

Another member of the Committee welcomed all the work and progress made by the Asset Team. He asked if there were sufficient staff to deal with routine enquiries which, on occasion, seemed to take time to be replied to. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development said the response time was often dictated by the complexity of the enquiry.

A further member of the Committee thanked the Asset and Investment Manager for the scale, scope and detail of the Team's work which was, she said, very impressive. The member asked if Energy Performance Certificates were statutory and if the Council could enhance its activities to ensure the environmental impact of a property was reduced and in support of the Council's carbon reduction targets. The Asset and Investment Manager said there were aspirations around sustainability and low environmental impact properties.

Another member asked about the timescales of an asset transfer. The Head of Operations said this was dependant on the complexity of the transfer and the terms of any liability to maintain the asset which needed to also be assumed.

A member of the Committee said that the on-line asset map was a very useful and comprehensive tool and praised the hard work that had gone into creating it. He asked if it was possible to increase charges to use the online facility to recoup staff costs incurred in compiling it. The Cabinet Member hoped this might be considered when the Council reviewed and considered its fees and charges.

Another member of the Committee, with reference to paragraph 9.2 of the report, asked if members could be advised which were the 12 surplus buildings to be sold and the 134 areas of land for disposal, and if the Council was sure these were the appropriate actions with these assets the right thing to do. The Cabinet Member responded that, once considered views on each asset were formed, the Asset Team would be able to better engage with members.

There being no further questions or matters raised for debate, the Chairman moved to the recommendation which was proposed by Councillor Robinson, seconded by Councillor Topping and by unanimous vote

## **RESOLVED**

That, a year after its implementation and having reviewed its progress, the Scrutiny Committee had received and commented upon the Asset Management Strategy 2019/23

8.20pm The Meeting was adjourned for ten minutes and reconvened at 8.30pm

## 6 Cabinet Member's update

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Norman Brooks, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport, to the meeting and invited him to provide his update.

Councillor Brooks explained that his portfolio was less involved in decision-making and, instead, was one that aimed to influence others' decisions for the benefit of East Suffolk's residents. He outlined some of the areas of work which he was involved with including the construction of Sizewell C, if it was approved, offshore wind, tourism infrastructures, proposals and lobbying for the re-trunking of the A12, a member of the Network Rail Group, the Ipswich Transport Task Group, the A14 Task Group and many other boards and focus groups related to transport matters. Councillor Brooks also referred to the trialling of electric buses in two locations in the district and the trialling of e-scooters in Lowestoft. Since 6 April 2020, the Council had assumed permanent responsibility for the administration of car parking enforcement and traffic regulation orders for car parks, waiting and residents' bays and to the launch of parking permits on the website the following week. Councillor Brooks added that there had been some delays in obtaining new signage for the Council's car parks but the ticket machines had been successfully altered.

The Chairman invited questions.

A member of the Committee referred to issues within her ward with cars parking partially on the pavement; she asked if this was legal or could be subject to enforcement. Councillor Brooks replied that, if a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) was in place at the site, then the cars were illegally parked and a ticket could be issued. However, if a TRO was not in place it was not an offence which the Council could deal with and, he suggested, should be reported to the police.

Another member of the Committee asked if the Council had in-house facilities to produce the new signage for the car parks. Councillor Brooks said there was no in-house team that could have produced the signage to the specification and type required by legislation.

A further member of the Committee asked if car parking enforcement officers worked 24/7: Councillor Brooks replied that they did not. The member suggested there was a need for a 'root and branch' review of yellow parking lines within the district and an investment in residents' parking in some locations. Councillor Brooks said that such a review was planned and asked the member to provide him with the details of the specific location for suggested residents' parking.

A member of the Committee asked if a FAQs area on car parking enforcement could be added to the Council's website. Councillor Brooks said this was planned. The member also asked if faded yellow lines could be repainted. Councillor Brooks said this was a county council responsibility but this Council's car parking enforcement officers were asked to report such matters.

Another member of the Committee asked if the Council could help to simplify, for residents, the degrees of abandonment that applied to cars and SORNs etc; she suggested a FAQs section on the website with a flowchart of actions to take. Councillor Brooks said that he would seek advice and come back to the member outside of the

meeting. The member also asked if the county council consulted East Suffolk Council about the integration and re-routing of bus services which could leave some residents isolated. Councillor Brooks said the Council was a consultee in such proposals.

In conclusion, the Chairman asked Councillor Brooks to say what he thought his top achievement was; Councillor Brooks said it was the implementation of a fully operational car parking enforcement service.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Brooks for his informative and comprehensive update.

## **7 Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2019/20**

The Chairman introduced his report on the work of the Scrutiny Committee in 2019/20. He asked the members of the Committee for any questions or comments.

It was suggested that future reports have pictures and a brief synopsis of each member of the Committee; it was felt to be important to emphasise the cross-party working of the Committee which, it was suggested, was a key strength of the Committee.

There being no other comments, the Chairman moved to the recommendation which was proposed by Councillor Robinson, Seconded by Councillor Cloke and by unanimous vote

### **RESOLVED**

That, having received the 2019/20 Annual Report by the Chairman of the Committee, the Scrutiny Committee agreed that future reports feature more information on the members of the Committee

## **8 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current Work Programme, the Council's Forward Plan and a draft remit for a future item on economic recovery and regeneration post-Covid19, which was approved.

A member of the Committee asked for some additional detail on the design and replacement of chalets at Jubilee Terrace which, she felt, had been due to come to Scrutiny Committee before consideration by Cabinet. The Clerk was asked to investigate this.

Clerk's Note: Subsequent to the meeting, it was confirmed that the item be scheduled to come before Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September prior to being considered by Cabinet in October.

The meeting concluded at 9:22pm.

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Chairman